



Hand Out: DIFFERENT KINDS OF FEMINISM

There are many ways to describe the multiple forms of feminism that have emerged since the 1960s, many of them overlapping with one another on key points. The following descriptions represent one way to categorize them and draw on a variety of sources. While these terms are contested, we try to summarize some of main elements of each that will allow a basic understanding of their differences and commonalities.

Liberal Feminism:

This kind of feminism works within the structure of mainstream society to integrate women into it and make it more responsive to individual women's rights, but does not directly challenge the system itself or the ideology behind women's oppression. The suffragist movement is an example.

Radical Feminism:

Radical feminism views patriarchy and sexism as the most elemental factor in women's oppression – cutting across all others from race and age to culture, caste and class. It questions the very system and ideology behind women's subjugation. The term often refers to the women's movements emerging from the civil rights, peace and other liberation movements at a time when people increasingly were questioning different forms of oppression and power. Radical feminists, seeking to understand the roots of women's subordination, have provided the major theoretical understanding that has served as the basis for the inspiration and analysis guiding women's movements around the world.

Black Feminism:

School of thought which argues that sexism, class oppression, gender identity and racism are inextricably bound together. The way these concepts relate to each other is called intersectionality. The term *intersectionality theory* was first coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. In her work, Crenshaw discussed Black feminism, which argues that the experience of being a black woman cannot be understood in terms of being black or of being a woman. Each concept is considered independently, but must include the interactions, which frequently reinforce each other. The Combahee River Collective argued in 1974 that the liberation of black women entails freedom for all people, since it would require the end of racism, sexism, and class oppression.

Marxist and Socialist Feminism:

Feminists, grounded in Marxist and socialist analysis, attribute women's oppression principally to the capitalist economic system where global corporate power prevails. Many other feminists believe that this form of power seen in the class system is a crucial factor in women's subordination but see patriarchy as the major force behind women's subjugation.



Cultural Feminism:

Cultural feminism emphasizes essential differences between men and women in terms of biology, personality and behavior. Women are seen to have different and superior virtues that provide the foundation for a shared identity, solidarity and sisterhood. Since by nature women are viewed as kinder and gentler than men, it follows that if women were in power, the world would be a better place. In the 1960s and 70s, some women supported the idea of forming separate women-only cultures.

Eco-Feminism:

This form of feminism views patriarchy and its focus on control and domination not only as a source of women's oppression but as being harmful to humanity as well as destructive of all living creatures and the earth itself. Combining a more comprehensive analysis of power often with a greater spiritual vision, eco-feminists see women's rights and empowerment linked to political, economic, social and cultural factors that benefit all living creatures and Mother Nature herself.

Transnational or Global Feminism:

This approach to feminism is concerned mainly about how globalization and capitalism affect people across nationalities, races, ethnicities, genders, classes, and sexualities and has reinforced a range of global movements. It recognizes inequalities across different groups of women and the importance of intersectionality as a way to understand and engage difference. While global issues do not affect women in the same way because of these differences, the impact of these issues and power dynamics are seen to be crucial to feminist social justice agendas. This vision understands the need for comprehensive approaches that integrate multiple issues and movements to find common cause across agendas to ensure long-term social transformation.

Visionary feminism:

The notion of visionary feminism, as seen in the many writings of the African-American feminist, bell hooks, combines the need to challenge patriarchy, class, race and other forms of oppression such as imperialism and corporate control. She also focuses on love and the role of men. "Visionary feminism is a wise and loving politics. It is rooted in the love of male and female being. . . The soul of feminist politics is the commitment to ending patriarchal domination of women and men, girls and boys. Love cannot exist in any relationship that is based on domination and coercion. Males cannot love themselves in patriarchal culture if their very self-definition relies on submission to patriarchal rules. When men embrace feminist thinking and practice, which emphasizes the value of mutual growth and self-actualization in all relationships, their emotional well-being will be enhanced. A genuine feminist politics always brings us from bondage to freedom, from loveless-ness to loving."